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ABSTRACT

This booklet is written to provide managers, supervisors, and workers with general information about Latino diversity, Latino language differences, and Latino culture as an influence in the work force. The text emphasizes two themes in particular: (1) the great diversity within the Latino group due to many racial and historical differences; and (2) the traditions of Latino culture. The first half of the text describes the changing U.S. workforce, defines the term "Latino" and explains the terms used by Latinos themselves to distinguish the various Latino groups. Diversity, described as the single most important thing to know about Latinos, is discussed under the following headings: (1) generational differences; (2) national differences; (3) urban-rural differences; (4) goal differences; and (5) language differences including the languages of indigenous Indian groups. The eagerness of Latinos for training in English as a Second Language, and techniques for communicating are also discussed. The second major topic, on Latino culture in relation to organizational culture looks at cultural patterns of Latinos in the context of the following topics: (1) how traditional Latinos are; (2) the wholistic view of life of traditional Latinos; (3) the Latino tradition of giving; (4) congeniality; (5) greetings; (6) relations with the boss; (7) embarrassment, not failure, as the greatest fear; and (8) efficiency and effectiveness. (JB)

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In The Work Force: Diversity And Tradition

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Latinos* In The Work Force: Diversity And Tradition

If we are to be productive at work and secure and confident in personal dealings, we will need to learn the skills of living in a world community, for that is what Los Angeles County has become.

The County's population has changed rapidly; more change is projected. A new mix of cultures and ethnicities is apparent on streets, in stores, in schools, in neighborhoods, and in workplaces.

The Changing Work Force

The *Harvard Business Review* reports that more than half of the nation's work force now consists of Asians, Blacks, Latinos, immigrants, and women. White native-born males, who used to dominate the workplace, now are a statistical minority.

The U.S. Department of Labor's *Workforce 2000* report forecasts continued change. Women, Asians, Blacks, and Latinos are expected to constitute 84 percent of all new workers by the year 2000. The U.S. Census reports that the Latino population in Los Angeles County increased by nearly 1.3 million, or 62 percent, between 1980 an 1990. Latinos are an increasing presence in all facets of life, including the workplace.

This booklet is written to provide managers, supervisors, and workers with general information about Latino diversity, language differences, and Latino culture as an influence in the workforce.

If, after reading this booklet, you think you know what Latinos are like, we will have failed in our undertaking. If, on the other hand, you have a new understanding of variety among Latinos, and if you begin to see that diversity as an enhancement to your workplace and your community, we will have succeeded.

**The term "Latino" is used here to include both men and women, as we would use "Asian," "Black," or "White." The term for a woman or women is "Latina(s)."*

Who is "Latino"?

We use the term "Latino" here to refer to persons whose cultural roots are in "Latinoamerica," that is, Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

A Latino may or may not be Spanish speaking. Many Latinos in the United States speak only English. Indians from Latino nations speak their indigenous languages, and Brazilians speak Portuguese. On the other hand, Filipinos, who may have Spanish surnames, speak Spanish, and resemble Latinos, are not Latino.

There are Latinos of all races and of mixed races. Some identify themselves as "people of color" along with American Indians, Asians, and Blacks. Others do not.

Group Identity

The term "Hispanic" was used by the Census in 1970 and is now often used in place of "Latino." The best advice we can give concerning group names is to refer to people by the term that they use in referring to themselves. For one person it may be "Latino," for another "Hispanic." For one, "Mexican American," for another "Chicano."

Terms of group identity are an important consideration. They often reflect heartfelt distinctions that should be respected.

You may hear Latino newcomers refer to non-Latino Whites as "Americans," or "Americanos." In Latin America they used the term "Norteamericanos."

The Single Most Important Thing to Know

There is significant diversity among Latinos. Respect for that diversity is essential to good relationships.

Generational Differences

Some Latinos are recent arrivals, others are later generation Americans. In between are the most bicultural generations, those Latino immigrants who have lived here many years, and the children of immigrants. Their cultural perspective and identity is

a mix of Latino and non-Latino elements. Third and later generations are likely to reflect as their primary culture the values, customs, and lifestyle of Southern California.

Some later generation Mexican Americans are descendents of "Californios," who lived here when this region was part of Mexico.

The Latino population here has grown in waves throughout this century. Workers came from Mexico and other Latin American countries on their own initiative and in response to recruitment programs. They worked in ranching, mining, agriculture, garment manufacturing, railroad, and other industries. Their contribution, however, was not always appreciated. At times Federal policies discouraged immigration or led to mass expulsions.

National Differences

Although the majority of Latinos in Southern California are of Mexican descent, the number of immigrants from Central America has increased dramatically over the last decade. Now all Central American, South American, and Caribbean countries are represented here.

Just as Americans and Canadians don't want to be lumped together, Latinos too are mindful of and proud of their differences. Cultures of Latino countries differ in part because of terrain and climate, relative exposure to or isolation from other countries, resources that attract world attention, historical experiences, and internal and world politics.

Immigrants do not ask that you make a study of their home countries' cultures and histories, but they do appreciate respect for national differences and your interest in learning.

Urban-Rural Differences

Although most recent Mexican immigrants come from rural communities, some are from urban centers. Central and South American immigrants tend to be disproportionately from urban centers, although the number from rural areas is increasing.

Some immigrants moved from the countryside to cities in search of jobs. When they couldn't find work, they came North.

Goal Differences

Recent newcomers include both immigrants and non-immigrants, and refugees.

Immigrants have made their homes here, hoping to earn a better life, with educational opportunity for their children.

Non-immigrant Latinos may also live and work here in order to support family members who have not come. Or they may be here for training or work experience that they can apply in their native countries.

Latino refugees, primarily from Central America, have come in search of a safe haven until hostilities in their home countries end.

Language Differences

Most Latino immigrants read, write, and speak Spanish. Some are fluent in two or more languages; some are nonliterate.

Half of all third-generation Mexican Americans speak English only. The majority of Latinos in the United States don't read or write in Spanish.

Latinos who speak Spanish may find that after being here a number of years or generations their Spanish has become dated. They continue to use words that have fallen into disuse in the countries they came from. They also combine English and Spanish to form new words.

Latinos may also differ markedly in their verbal and nonverbal expressiveness. Some Latino cultures are quite vigorous, spirited, and emotionally expressive; others are relatively subdued. In this way they vary as much as non-Latino cultures do.

Indians

The presence of Indian populations, including Konjobal Mayans from Guatemala, Mixtecs and Zapotecs from Mexico, and other Mayans from Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize deserves particular

mention. They are often assumed to be Mexican. Some, especially the women, speak only their indigenous languages and perhaps a little English. They may also be nonliterate. Spanish translations are not helpful for them.

Indian populations in Latin America have contributed to language diversity. Hundreds of Indian words have entered the Spanish that is spoken in their homelands. Those words are distinct to their region or to regions where those people migrated, and are not shared by all Spanish speakers.

Use of Generalizations

Because of national, ethnic, generational, and experiential diversity, generalizations are of limited value. Nevertheless, we attempt here to describe a Latino perspective which may apply in greater or lesser degree to the individuals you will work with.

The suggestions we offer here are meant to help you relate successfully across cultural differences. If there is one lesson that always applies, it is this: make no assumptions; respect the individual.

The Spoken Word

Spanish continues to be the common denominator among most Latinos. For most immigrants, it is their first language. For Mexican Americans, it may be their second language, or a language they understand but do not speak, or a part of family history that links them to recent immigrants.

Spanish language skills have been both welcomed and rejected in the workplace. Many professions cannot recruit enough Spanish speakers to serve monolingual Spanish speaking clients. On the other hand, some non-Spanish speakers are uncomfortable or offended when colleagues speak Spanish in their presence.

Adult immigrants are eager to learn English so that they can participate in the broader community, and so that they can relate to the world that their children will grow up in. Adult classes in English as a Second Language are filled to capacity and every vacancy is immediately filled from a long waiting list.

English as a Second Language

Any monolingual American who has traveled to places where English is not generally spoken understands why immigrant Latinos may lapse into Spanish. When your vocabulary in a second language is limited, you must make do with the words you know. You may be able to get by, but not as you would want. So, when you are in the company of another person who speaks your native tongue, it is a relief. Then you can speak your mind fully, quickly, accurately. In addition, the emotional content of messages spoken in one's native language may be more important than the words used.

To learn English, native Spanish speakers must hear and produce sounds that did not previously exist for them. They must make their tongues and lips and voice boxes do things they never did before. For them, speaking English may be as difficult as it is for English speakers to produce a rolled "r," or French nasal tones, or German guttural tones.

We learn as toddlers to produce the sounds we hear, and those sounds differ depending on the language. When Spanish words end in one of ten ways and English words end in as many as 40 ways, you can understand how hard it is.

Persons speaking a second language also have a tendency to take statements literally, not only in the case of jokes, but also in the case of instructions. A manager should not, therefore, say, "There is no money for training this year," when he or she really means, "Training will be funded only if you can convince me that it meets a critical need and will increase productivity."

Techniques for Communicating

The more specific information and instructions are, the more comfortable and confident a worker with limited English skills will be. Rather than say, "When you have a batch of applications, take them to XYZ Department," you might say, "When you have about 10 applications..." or, "Once a month...."

When assigning a task, it is usually a good idea to explain why something should be done, and perhaps why it should be

done in a certain way. This is particularly true if the worker whom you instruct is reluctant to ask questions.

Even with problems of limited English and accents, Latino immigrants generally prefer spoken communication to written, because speech is more personal. When it is possible, communicate through speaking and follow up with written communication. That way you will reach both those people whose spoken English is better developed and those who can read English better than they can converse in it.

You might consider increasing your language skills. Any attempt on your part to learn Spanish, even just a word or two, will be appreciated.

Supervisors have asked us how they might get Latinos to share their opinions or speak up more in group meetings. Latinos who are quiet in meetings suggested several ways: let them know in advance what they will be asked for, hold small group sessions, or take time to meet one-on-one.

American business communication is task-oriented and concise — "Let's get to the point," we say. This style generally restricts conversation to the question at hand. Traditional Latino exchanges differ. They tend to look at all dimensions of a subject, and to value not only the outcome, but also the process. Casual conversation may also be appreciated because it makes work seem less tedious.

Latino Culture in Organizational Culture

How Traditional?

Latino traditions and values are central to immigrants' life and identity. This is particularly true for those coming from small towns and villages with no experience in urban living. As time passes, and as they experience life here, immigrants usually become less traditional, some very quickly. For subsequent generations, traditions may be reduced to an echo. Many immigrants regard later generation Latino Americans as "Americans," not Latino at all.

To the extent that an individual is traditional, he or she

may reflect traditional Latino values in the workplace that differ from those of non-Latinos.

Wholistic Life

It is said that modern American life is compartmentalized. This may be particularly true in Southern California, where long commutes can separate home, workplace, schools, churches, and social friends. We tend to compartmentalize our time as well. We split the week into work time, family time, and recreational time. We speak of "wearing different hats."

Some of us try to integrate our responsibilities and interests into a single balanced and fulfilling whole. This wholistic view is an important part of Latino tradition. Coworkers of Latinos are as likely to be invited to a housewarming party as are neighbors or friends from church. Traditional Latinos greet colleagues at work with the same care and courtesy as they greet guests at home.

A traditional Latino would not think of his or her hours at work as eight or more hours to be endured in order to enjoy the rest of the day and evening. Rather, he or she is likely to seek as much personal satisfaction and pleasure from the hours on the job as possible. The idea is not to put in time, but to do a job. In Latino countries, workers often stay late to complete work without being asked.

Mainstream American culture is said to make work a life priority. Men in particular are said to be defined by their occupations. Although work is not the center of Latino life, it is frequently a topic of conversation. Talk of work at a family gathering is considered neither out of place, nor the sign of a workaholic. This again reflects the wholistic view.
No work is menial, as long as it is an honest way to contribute to the welfare of the family. Cultural values may come into conflict, however, when job demands infringe upon a worker's time with friends and family. This is particularly true for Latinas.

A Tradition of Giving

Mutual support is assumed among most Latinos. They freely offer help and freely respond to requests for help. Both helping and being helped come naturally. In residential neighborhoods recent immigrants are likely to be sharing and caring of neighbors. But this sense of community seems to decline with time in this country and exposure to other lifestyles.

The Latino tradition of hospitality and generosity is visible at work on such occasions as potluck parties, or when someone passes the hat for a group gift. The Latino intent is not to take care of his or her obligatory share, but to make a gift.

Like other employees, Latinos appreciate and respond to recognition and rewards. In Latin American countries traditional rewards are cash bonuses.

Congeniality

In general, Latinos, perhaps more than non-Latinos, respond to relaxed, warm, harmonious environments where they are encouraged and nurtured. The concepts of creative tension and constructive conflict are contrary to Latino values.

In workplaces, Latinos may gravitate to one another, especially to people of the same home village, nationality, or generation. Latinos who do not speak Spanish are generally included.

Latinos tend to look for and value a supportive work environment. Verbal assurances from coworkers, supervisors, and managers are taken to heart unless, of course, the speaker is known to be insincere.

Greetings

Greetings, like other aspects of Latinos' lives, vary. Later generation Latino Americans may greet coworkers with a simple "Good morning," or "Hi! How are you?" More traditional Latinos might consider so brief a greeting to be rather abrupt. They may prefer spending a few minutes chatting with coworkers, inquiring about their well-being and that of their families.

Some supervisors have found it important to greet workers by name and to initiate eye contact even when the worker appears reluctant. This may be particularly true for recent immigrants and for blue collar workers.

The Boss

Supervisors and managers of Latino staff may hear themselves quoted often. "Gene said this," "Gene has decided that." This is a reflection of the boss as a traditional authority figure —in contrast to using "we" to indicate the team, or division, or company.

The boss' behavior may be taken quite personally. If the boss is happy, or solemn, or angry, a Latino worker's first thought may be that he or she is somehow reacting to that worker.

Where appropriate, it would be helpful to explain changes in mood. For example, "I'm losing patience with this contractor, they never follow through on commitments," or "I didn't get much sleep last night — my allergies kept me awake."

If the boss makes it clear by word and by example that he or she welcomes candor, he or she can get it. One supervisor told us that Latino workers who are reluctant to take issue with one another will do so with her, because they have learned that she views differences of opinion as contributions to the work.

The Greatest Fear

Many Latinos interviewed for this booklet told us that their greatest fear is not failure, but embarrassment.

Depending on the kind of work and the extent of an oversight, error, or misjudgment, most workers take some correction and criticism in stride. "We all make mistakes," the saying goes. Reprimands, of course, should be given in private.

For the sensitive person who fears embarrassment, it is particularly important that correction and criticism be given in constructive terms. Supervisors and managers who take time and make the effort not only to point out what's wrong, but at the same time point out progress and potential, will get the best results.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Peter Drucker, renowned business consultant and author, describes efficiency as "doing better what is already being done." Doing things right. On the other hand, says Drucker, effectiveness is doing the right things. It focuses on opportunity.

Efficiency is cost conscious, and can generally be measured short-term. Effectiveness may complement efficiency by investing in the future. Teambuilding, for example, which requires patience and commitment, may not be efficient in the short-term, but may produce long-term efficiencies.

In comparison to traditional American supervisory and management styles, working with tradition-oriented Latinos is more a matter of human relationships, less a matter of systems, rules, and regulations.

The interpersonal skills of supervisors and managers take on new importance. The traditional Latino looks to his or her immediate boss as a role model — for better or worse. To win respect, the boss must be consistent, communicative, open, fair, friendly, honest, suppportive, and flexible; qualities that would be appreciated by any worker. Latinos tend to give their loyalty to those who prove themselves sincere. Once given, that loyalty is hard to shake.

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